

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

26 August 1960

SUBJECT: Archival Sampling

1. Source for the following abstracts is Paul Lewinson, "Archival Sampling", The American Archivist, 20:291 (October 1957).

2. Definition:

"Sampling of Government Archives consists in the selection of some part of a body of homogeneous records, so that some aspects of the Government's work or the information received or developed by the Government may be represented or illustrated thereby."

3. Objectives of Sampling

A sample of records is preserved for its evidential and/or informational value.

- a. Evidential values are those that shed light on administrative history: the origins of a program, its implementation in procedures and its manner of execution. Such records explain the organization and function of the Agency that produced them.
- b. Informational values are those relating to information on persons, problems, conditions, things and techniques. Such records can have values for research in fields other than administrative history.

4. General Considerations

- a. Bodies of records are appropriate for sampling if their total volume is very large compared with the importance of their content and the degree of research interest in their subject matter - it is inconceivable that all could or should be kept, but undesirable that none should be.
- b. In the case of records whose value is chiefly evidential, the sample will usually consist of typical records that will document agency operations more precisely than do the general directives, policy statements, work statistics and reports that are usually preserved in any event. Such samples will tend to be relatively small in total volume.
- c. In the case of records whose value is chiefly informational, sampling is more likely to be on the basis of the non-typical; that is, records relating to leading, important,

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or significant matters will be segregated from the whole body for retention. The size of such samples will depend wholly on how many important or significant persons, places, things, conditions, or events fall within the scope of activity of the Agency whose records are under consideration.

- d. Not all large bodies of homogeneous records need be sampled. Examples are "housekeeping" records and records whose informational content is amply covered in other records or in non-archival sources.
- e. A random sample is made in cases where typical or representative records are to be retained.
- f. A selected sample is made where certain significant records are to be retained. This selective process requires criteria of significance and is a task that should not be left to clerical personnel.
- g. Samples should be drawn, ticketed for drawing or covered by very specific instructions as soon as possible. In the case of selected samples it is desirable to fix responsibility for the job at a high enough level in the Agency. Instructions for sampling should be incorporated in records control schedules.

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